DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 671 CS 506 558

AUTHOR Neumann, David S.
TITLE Mind as Organization: An Optimistic Metaphorical Base for the Study of Intrapersonal Communications.
PUB DATE 6 Nov 88
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Processes; Communication Research; *Metaphors; Models; Organizational Communication; Speech Communication; *Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Intrapersonal Communication; Metaphorical Thought; Organizational Culture; Systemic Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The mind as organization metaphor asserts an optimistic and multi-faceted foundation for the examination of intrapersonal communication. Definitions of intrapersonal communication have not been developed without debate and controversy. As with many other ambiguous terms and definitions in the field of communication, an operational definition of the concept in focus must be accepted, and used as a basis for investigation. Once the definition has been established, connections and relationships to other areas of study can be made. This investigation accepts Roberts, Edwards, and Barker's operational definition of intrapersonal communication: "All of the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happens within individuals at conscious and non-conscious levels as they attempt to understand themselves and the environment." The two aspects of this definition of intrapersonal communication--the processing of messages and interacting with the environment--can be interpreted in a variety of ways. The traditional approach to organizational communication is general systems theory which developed out of the field of biology and was aimed to be a covering theory for all systemic processes. The contemporary approach is the organizational culture view which allows the investigator to examine histories, values, and beliefs of an organization from an interpretive perspective. One of the goals of the culture perspective is to uncover how organizations create social realities in which people communicate. Both approaches may be fruitful in the examination of intrapersonal communication. (Twenty-seven references are attached.) (RAE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED305671

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

David Neumann

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

MIND AS ORGANIZATION:

An Optimistic Metaphorical Base For the Study of Intrapersonal Communications

David S. Neumann

Professional and Technical Communication Program
Rochester Institute of Technology

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, November 6, 1988

CS506558

Introduction

The common denominator across all communication contexts, is the individual, the cognitive processor. Communication within one individual, or intrapersonal communication, is "so pervasive that it cuts across all other contexts, making it a universal theme (Littlejohn, 1983, p. 8)." Intrapersonal communication is increasingly being used as the label for process that occur within the individual's "black-box". The "black-box" metaphor implies that investigators of the human mind, including cognivite processes such as creativity, decision-making, and attitude structures, are faced with blind direction and little hope of enlightening insight.

This paper attempts to give investigators of the human mind a different metaphorical base to work from. The "mind as organization" metaphor asserts a more optimistic and multi-faceted foundation for the examination of intrapersonal communication.

Definitions of intrapersonal communication have not been developed without debate and controversy (Cunningham, 1987). As with many other ambiguous terms and definitions in the field of communication, one must accept an operational definition of the concept in focus, and use that definition as a basis for investigation. Once the definition has been established, connections and relationships to other areas of study can be made. This investigation accepts the following operational definition of intrapersonal communication: "All of the physiological and psychological processing of messages that happens within individuals at conscious and non-conscious levels as they attempt to understand themselves and their environment (Roberts, et al., 1987, p. 62)."

This definition can be broken down into two major areas. One area

focuses on the processing of messages on a variety of levels: physiological, psychological, conscious, and non-conscious. It is the processing of messages that allows an individual to make sense, cocreate, or put order to an environment (Larson, 1986).

The second main focus of the definition concerns itself with "sense-making" (Geertz, 1973) of the relationships between the environment and the self. With this definition, there is an implied difference, a distinct separation of the self and the environment. The connection between the self and the environment is the processing of information, stimuli, messages, cues, or input. This processing, via intrapersonal communication, connects us to our world.

The two aspects of this definition of intrapersonal communication, 1) the processing of messages, and 2) interacting with the environment, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. If we were to examine these components in isolation of a context, it may appear that we are discussing computer systems which both process information and interact with an environment (Thompson, 1987). It also may appear that we are focusing on a simple biological or chemical interaction both of which process information and interact with the environment. By removing a definition from a context, we are actively mutating metaphors.

Karl Weick (1969) urges investigators of communication phenomena to mutate metaphors, or to take definitions, which are metaphors, out of context and attempt to create sense out of them from a variety of perspectives. By taking Weicks' advice, we can further mutate the definition of intrapersonal communication, information processing and interacting with the environment, and conclude that we are focusing on an organization. Traditional definitions of organizations focus on

information processing while more contemporary definitions focus on making sense of the environment. By mutating metaphors, an interesting relationship is developed between the study of intrapersonal communication and the study of organizational communication.

The remainder of this paper will examine traditional and contemporary views of organizational communication and propose how the components of these views can be used to aid in the understanding of intrapersonal communication processes. The traditional approach to organizational communication is general systems theory, the contemporary approach is the organizational culture view.

Systems Theory Approach

Perhaps the most traditional approach to the study of organizational communication uses the systems theory perspective (Monge, 1982). Developed out of the field of biology (Bertalanffy, 1968), systems theory aimed to be a covering theory for all systemic processes: "It seems legitimate to ask for a theory, not of systems of a more or less special kind, but of universal principles applying to systems in general (p. 32)." Both organizations and intrapersonal communication can be viewed from this perspective: "Organizational communication has predominantly been studied from the viewpoint of system theory (Monge, 1982, p. 245)" and will be used to examine the relationships between the explanations of intrapersonal communication and organizational communication on a metaphorical level.

An organization may be seen as either an open or closed system. Open systems interact with their environments: "they take in energy and materials (input), transform these input in some way (throughput), then return products and by-products of throughput to the environment (output)

(Daniels & Spiker, 1987, p. 64)." From an intrapersonal communication perspective, these inputs, throughputs, and outputs can be examined in two ways.

Mind as Subsystem

The first way is to view the individual mind as a subsystem existing within an environment consisting of larger and more encompassing systems. Taking this view, the inputs and outputs exist outside of the individual; they exist in the physical environment or in the psychological and perceptual processes of others. Intrapersonal communication exists in the throughput processes of the model. Here input is cognitively transformed and manipulated, perhaps with the goal of sense-making and dissonance reduction (Festinger, 1966). From an organizational communication perspective, the inputs are gathered from the environment outside of the organization proper. These included resources, external governing bodies, the world economy, and anything else affecting the organization's functions. The throughput can be seen as the restructuring of resources to create a product, and the output seen as the product, service, or organization's public image.

Mind as Complete System

The second way to examine the inputs, throughputs, and outputs, is by viewing the individual mind as the complete system. With this view, the inputs are self-generated "sense-data" (Neumann, 1987), the throughputs are the cognitive processing of these data, and the outputs are self-perceptions, motivations, behaviors, interpretations, or any other manifestations of cognitive processing. Via this perspective, the human mind creates it own symbols and supplies itself with its own self-generated input, procesess this input, and retains the processed

data. Even when presented with data from the external environment, it is the individual who becomes the symbolizing agent and recreates data which allows for self-persuasion (Burtis, 1987). The process of dreaming and fantasizing can be used to substantiate the use of this metaphor. During the dreaming process we are creating for our own private interpretations, scenes, emotions, images, feelings, and other input which we may unconsciously or consciously process. The processing of these intrapersonal communications may help us to examine our conscious motivations, direct our decisions, increase or decrease our level of dissonance, or a variety of other output consequences. Organizations also create their own input, process the input, and respond to their own output. The organizational newsletter (input) is designed to communicate to the employees, and perhaps motivate them (throughput), and hopefully increase corporate morale or productivity (output).

Either one of the systemic views, the mind as a subsystem or the mind as a complete system, conforms to the operational definition of intrapersonal communication previously discussed. The mind as a complete system supports the idea of internal processing of messages on conscious and non-conscious levels while the mind as a subsystem relates to the connection of intrapersonal processes to the external environment.

Other tenets of systems theory can be used to further this investigation. Equifinality, means "that a particular final state may be accomplished in many ways and from many different starting points (Littlejohn, 1983, p. 32)." Research into intrapersonal decision-making and reasoning processes state that there are various ways in which an individual may arrive at a conclusion or decision (Evans, 1976). Internal dialogue, as discussed by Mead (1934) posits the "actor" in the role of

choosing actions and behaviors internally prior to displaying actual actions or behaviors (Honeycutt, Zagacki & Edwards, 1987). The goals of the "actor" is to reach a specified end; this end can be approached intrapersonally from a variety of angles or starting point. Organizations can also be analyzed using this concept. Focusing on other tenets of systems theory will further support this connection between metaphors viable for the discussion and investigation of both organizational and intrapersonal communication.

Organizational Culture Approach

A more contemporary approach to organizational communication can be used to examine intrapersonal communication. Breaking away from the systemic, linear, and mechanistic implications of systems theory, the view of "organization as culture" allows the investigator to examine histories, values, and beliefs of an organization from an interpretive perspective (Packanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1984; Smircich, 1981; Smircich & Calas, 1987). One of the goals of the culture perspective is to uncover how organizations create social realities in which people communicate (Hawes, 1979). These social realities of organizational cultures and climates are extremely complex (Jablin, 1980). There are many interacting forces which allow for the "web of significance" (Packanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 123) to be spun. The systems theory approach of nonsummativity has been applied to this perspective (James & Jones, 1974) whereby the total significance of the organization may be interpreted only when the forces act as a collectivity. It is the human mind that "creates order to the environment (Schneider & Bartlett, 1970, p. 510)" by interpreting this collectivity of information.

Packanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982) supply a non-exhaustive set

of indicators which focus on organization sense-making. These indicators are communication events existing within the spun web of significance of the organization. Intrapersonal processes can be analyzed using some of these same metaphors: facts, vocabulary, metaphors, and stories.

Facts

"Each organizational culture has its system of facts which members use to explain how and why the organization operates the way it does (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 124)." These fact are actually concretized relevant constructs used to create "social knowledge". Facts are used to explain operations, predict outcomes, and justify action and attitudes. Intrapersonally, the individual may use "facts" as a personal explanation tool. "I avoided a conflict-producing situation because I am not able to control my emotion" may be a statement of fact used by someone to describe their own intrapersonal processes. Individuals define themselves in factual terms which allow them to explain themselves.

Vocabulary

"Another distinguishing feature of any organizational culture is the particular vocabulary used by its members (Packanowsky & O'Donnell-Trijillo, 1982, p. 125)." Internally, we engage in internal dialogues (Weaver, Neumann, Cotrell, & Weiss, 1988), self-talk (Ellis, 1962), or conversations with ourselves (Mead, 1934). The vocabulary we use about ourselves has a strong impact of our perceptions of ourselves an our environment. This vocabulary may be potentially self-destructive as exemplified by the intrapersonal statement from the previous paragraph. Rational Emotive Therapy (Ellis, 1962) attempts to isolate, understand, and irradicate negative internal vocabulary in order to produce a more productive image of the self. Functioning under the premise, organiza-

tions may attempt to isolate and change vocabulary used by employees.

Metaphors

"Useful displays of organizational culture related to vocabulary are the metaphors used by organizational members (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 125)." Internal dialogue may use metaphors as well. Beyond vocabulary, but still metaphorical, are the visual images we have of ourselves. This intrapersonal communication process may enlighten us to a facet of ourselves of which we are not consciously aware. Mutating the metaphors, both linguistic and visual, may allow us to see ourselves through a new perspective.

Stories

Stories are communicated within organization. They serve to create continuity between generations, as folklore, and put the organization into historical context. "These legends weave an historical texture into the organization, a texture which members come to recognize and re-shape in their continual narration (Packanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 126)." Just as we pass stories of our personal experiences to others, we communicate them to ourselves. We rely on our experiences to shape our interpretation of the present, expectations of the future, and to direct our actions. We are often "guilty" of re-shaping our past experience and personal stories when we pass them to other, and when we recall them for personal purposes. Our stories become less detailed, more dramatic in these details, and are filled in with what our perceptions tell us should be there (Allport & Postman, 1945). Nonetheless, both organizations and individuals rely on stories for sense-making purposes.

As with this papers discussion of systems theory, only selected tenets of the culture approach have been discussed. The other tenets

require a greater depth of interpretation and analysis in order to strenghten the relationship between organizational and intrapersonal communication metaphors.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to draw a comparison between organizational and intrapersonal communication in the method of examination via metaphor. Two prevasive methods of studying organizational communication, the systems theory and the culture approah were used. Aspects from both of these methods of investigation were discussed in their application to both contexts. Many relationships were made which suggest that both the systems and culture approach may be fruitful in the examination of intrapersonal communication.

It is the intention of this author to continue the present line of investigation by examiniing other approaches to organizational communication. The "goodness of fit" between these other approaches of organizational and intrapersonal communication will be ascertained. Eventually the author aims to arrive at a metaphor which will "comfortably" explain both organizations and the mind.

REFERENCES

Allport G. W., & Postman, L. J. (1945). The basic psychology of rumor. Transactions of the New York Acadamy of Sciences, 2, 61-81.

Bertalanffy, L. V. (1968). General system theory. NY: George Braziller.

Burtis, J. O. (1987). Receiver as source: Richness of fantasy. Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Cunningham, S. B. (1987). Defining intrapersonal communication. Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Daniels, T. D., & Spiker, B. K. (1987). Perspectives on organizational communication. DuBuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.

Ellis, A. (1962). Reason and emotion in psychotherapy. NY: Stuart.

Evans, J. St. B. T. (1976). A critical note on Quinton and Fellow's observation of reasoning strategies. British Journal of Psychology, 67, 517-518.

Festinger, L. (1962). A theory of cognitive dissonance. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Geertz, C. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. NY: Basic Books.

Hawes, L. C. (1979). On characterizing organizations' cultures. Presented at the Purdue Lecture Series on Theoretical Perspectives in Organizational Communication, Purdue, IN.

Honeycutt, J. M., Zagacki, K. S., & Edwards, R. (1987). Intrapersonal communication and imagined interactions. Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Jablin, F. M. (1980). Organizational communication theory and research: An overview of communication climate and network research. In D. Nimmo (Ed.), Communication yearbook 4, (pp. 327-347. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

James, L. R., & Jones, A. P. (1974). Organizational climates: A review of theory and research. Psychological Bulletin, 81, 1096-1112.

Larson, C. U. (1986). Persuasion: Reception and responsibility. (4th. ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Littlejohn, S. W. (1983). Theories of human communication (2nd. ed.). Belmont CA: Wadsworth.

Mead, G. H. (1934). Mind, self and society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Monge, P. R. (1982). System theory and research in the study of organizational communications: The correspondence problem. Human Communication Research, 8, 245-261.

Neumann, D. S. (1987). Imaging and creativity: Creating and reacting to sense data. Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Packanowsky, M. E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1982). Communication and organizational cultures. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 46, 115-130.

Packanowsky, M. E., & O'Donnell-Trujillo, N. (1984). Organizational communication as cultural performance. Communication Monographs, 50, 126-147.

Roberts, C., Edwards, R., & Barker, L. (1987). Intrapersonal Communication Processes. Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.

Schneider, B, & Bartlett, C. (1970). Individual differences and organizational climate II: Measurement of organizational climate by multitrait multirater matrix. Personnel Psychology, 23, 493-512.

Smircich, L. (1981). The concept of culture and organizational analysis. Presented at the SCA/ICA Conference on Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Communication, Alta, UT.

Smircich, L. & Calas, M. B. (1987). Organizational culture: A critical analysis. In F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, & L. W. Porter (Eds.), Handbook of organizational communication: An interdisciplinary perspective (pp. 228-263). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Thompson, T. N. (1987). Intrapersonal creativity as a muddling dialectic. Presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, MA.

Weaver, R. L. II, Neumann, D. S., Cotrell, H. W., & Weiss, P. E. (1988). Imaging as an aid in understanding and practicing public speaking. Texas Journal of Speech Communication, 13, 37-47.

Weick, C. E. (1969). The social psychology of organizing. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.